

Local Comprehensive Plans Certification Report Snohomish County Comprehensive Plan

June 26, 2025



The Puget Sound Regional Council conducted a certification review of the Snohomish County comprehensive plan. Snohomish County adopted its 2024 comprehensive plan update on December 4, 2024. PSRC staff provided comments on the draft plan in summer 2023 and March 2024 to inform the final plan adopted by the county.

This document is organized into two primary parts: a statement of certification and any applicable conditions to certification; and a discussion of conformity with the Growth Management Act and consistency with VISION 2050 by topic area.

Certification Action

The Puget Sound Regional Council certifies that the transportation-related provisions in the Snohomish County 2024 comprehensive plan conform to the Growth Management Act and are substantially consistent with multicounty planning policies and the Regional Transportation Plan.

Within the central Puget Sound region, local governments and PSRC have worked together to develop an overall process for reviewing and certifying local, countywide, regional center, and long-range transit plans.¹ Transportation-related provisions that are key for certification are based on RCW 47.80.026 and the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A). This report may recommend additional work to fully address the requirements of the Growth Management Act, VISION 2050, or the Regional Transportation Plan, although such revisions may not be strictly required for certification. Jurisdictions are encouraged to address those items during upcoming comprehensive plan updates and other planning efforts.

Conformity with Growth Management Act Transportation Planning Requirements and Consistency with Regional Plans and Policies

OVERVIEW

This section discusses conformity with the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.070(6)) and the transportation-related requirements for local comprehensive plans. It also discusses consistency with the adopted multicounty planning policies (established regional guidelines and principles under RCW 47.80.026) adopted in VISION 2050 and the Regional

¹ The certification requirement in the Growth Management Act is described in RCW 47.80. The specific requirements for transportation elements in local comprehensive plans are spelled out in RCW 36.70A.070. PSRC's Interlocal Agreement, Section VII, also provides direction for the review of local comprehensive plans and countywide policies (Resolution A-91-01, amended March 1998). The Council's Executive Board last updated its process for Policy and Plan Review in September 2003. The process is also described in [VISION 2050: Implementation](#).



Transportation Plan. In addition to the multicounty planning policies, VISION 2050 contains a regional growth strategy with a preferred distribution of the region's residential and employment growth, as well as several implementation actions for local governments to carry out. Each policy area addressed in VISION 2050 is discussed in turn below. More information about the requirement to review and certify local plans is provided in the [Adopted Policy and Plan Review Process](#).

Plans are reviewed using PSRC's [VISION 2050 Consistency Tool](#). This report documents where the plan meets requirements, highlights outstanding provisions of the plan, and identifies where additional work is needed to fully address VISION 2050, the Regional Transportation Plan, or Growth Management Act planning requirements. This section is organized by the sections in VISION 2050. While this may align with plan elements, many of these concepts may be addressed in various parts of local comprehensive plans.

Regional Collaboration

Scope of Review

The Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.070(6)) and VISION 2050 call for local comprehensive plans to:

- **Coordinate** with other jurisdictions, agencies, tribes, ports, military installations, and special purpose districts.
- Prioritize **access to opportunity** for people of color, people with low incomes, and historically underserved communities.
- Address opportunities and challenges related to **military installations** when applicable.
- Prioritize investments in **centers**.
- Explore **funding sources** and fiscal tools to meet infrastructure and other needs.

Certification Findings

The Snohomish County comprehensive plan effectively addresses regional collaboration policies in VISION 2050. The county completed a full reorganization of the comprehensive plan to provide a clearer and more user-friendly document. The plan includes a new Tribal Coordination element that outline goals, policies, and objectives for the county's practices for working with Tribes and policies specific to the Tulalip, Stillaguamish, and Sauk-Suiattle Tribes. The plan includes a new Equity sub-element to ensure meaningful engagement with historically and currently marginalized communities. The plan includes policies to collaborate with jurisdictions, agencies, service providers, and other organizations.



Regional Growth Strategy

Scope of Review

VISION 2050 calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Incorporate **housing and employment targets**.
- Use **land use assumptions** substantially consistent with countywide growth targets.
- Demonstrate sufficient zoned **development capacity** to accommodate targets.
- Use consistent **land use assumptions** throughout plan.
- Maintain a **stable urban growth area** with densities that support the Regional Growth Strategy.
- Support growth in designated **centers and high-capacity transit station areas**.
- Manage and reduce **rural growth** and protect natural resource lands.

Certification Findings

The Snohomish County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the Regional Growth Strategy policies in VISION 2050. The plan documents capacity to accommodate the allocated growth targets in the urban unincorporated area. The plan focuses planning for existing growth in the urban growth area, particularly in unincorporated areas that will be served by Link light rail. The county adopted a new Urban Core Subarea Plan element designed to create a complete community with a variety of housing, services, and amenities that can be accessed by transportation options including transit, walking, and biking.

The plan includes a policy to reduce the rate of growth in rural and resource lands consistent with VISION 2050, so that the total population outside of the urban growth area does not exceed 144,190 by the year 2044. The plan includes a commitment to monitor rural growth rates and, if an extrapolation of the county's annual estimates of rural population growth indicates that the rural population target will be exceeded within two years, the county will implement strategies to manage growth. These strategies may include a cap on total rural population growth, annual metering of building permits or lots, or adjustments to development regulations to bring rural growth trends back into alignment with the adopted target.

The county should address the following comments in future updates to the plan:

- PSRC will complete an in-depth review of regional centers in 2025. PSRC's [Regional Centers Framework](#) requires adopted center plans for manufacturing/industrial centers. The county has adopted policies related to the manufacturing/industrial center but has not adopted a plan for this area with the City of Everett. The county should promptly undertake this work to comply with the Regional Centers Framework.
- While the whole of Snohomish County's urban unincorporated area has sufficient capacity for allocated growth, the county's plan proposes adjustments to the countywide growth targets to align with capacity for housing, population, and employment growth. The county plans to update growth targets through the



reconciliation process later this year. The county should follow-through with this work to update the countywide planning policies.

- The rural growth targets reflect a commitment to manage rural growth, and the county is commended for adopting policies to ensure consistency with VISION 2050. Reducing the rate of rural growth will be a long-term effort, and the county should continue to identify strategies, tools and development regulations to help reduce rural growth consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy.

Environment

Scope of Review

VISION 2050 calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Ensure **air quality standards** are met and reduce emissions of air toxics and greenhouse gases.
- Protect **critical areas and habitat** through coordination and environmental stewardship.
- Plan for **park, trail, and open space** resources and needs.
- Protect and enhance **tree canopy and native vegetation**.
- Protect and restore **water quality**, including actions to restore shorelines and estuaries, remove fish-passage barriers, reduce toxic products, and manage stormwater.
- Ensure **access to healthy environments** for all residents, prioritizing the reduction of impacts for vulnerable residents.

Certification Findings

The Snohomish County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the environmental policies in VISION 2050. The plan includes policies to connect and enhance habitat, provide conservation incentives, protect air quality, and support open space. The plan includes a new Urban Tree Canopy sub-element to provide for healthy urban forests that support ecosystem services, public health, environmental resiliency, and quality of life. The plan commits to developing an urban forest management plan that identifies, protects and restores forests and plants that have significant value.



Climate Change

Scope of Review

VISION 2050 calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Reduce **greenhouse gas emissions** in support of state, regional, and local reductions goals.
- Protect and restore natural resources that **sequester and store carbon**.
- Address impacts to **vulnerable populations** that have been or will be impacted by climate change.
- Retrofit **existing buildings** to reduce building energy use.
- Increase **resilience** by identifying and addressing the impacts of climate change and natural hazards.
- Address **rising sea levels** by siting and planning for relocation out of the floodplain.

Certification Findings

The Snohomish County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the climate change policies in VISION 2050. The plan includes a new Climate element with policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare for the impacts of climate change. The plan adopts regional greenhouse gas emission reduction targets and incorporates information from the countywide emissions inventory. Snohomish County developed an online Climate Vulnerability Tool that combines data about exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity to understand which communities and areas in the county are most vulnerable to impacts of climate change.

The county should address the following comment in future updates to the plan:

- The county has made important progress on addressing climate change in the comprehensive plan. The Department of Commerce plans to release final guidance on climate planning consistent with House Bill 1181 in 2025, which will apply to the implementation progress report for jurisdictions in the Puget Sound region. The county should be aware of this upcoming deadline and monitor whether the plan's current state reflects the new requirements.



Land Use/Development Patterns

Scope of Review

VISION 2050 calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Build **thriving urban communities** through inclusive engagement.
- Support **centers** as connections to opportunity.
- Address **healthy environment**, physical activity and well-being, and safety, while reducing disparities.
- Support **annexation and incorporation** by planning for phased growth of communities.
- Preserve **rural areas and natural resource lands**.
- Evaluate potential **residential and commercial displacement** and mitigate impacts.
- Limit **incompatible uses** adjacent to military lands, industrial centers, and tribal reservation lands.

Certification Findings

The Snohomish County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the land use and development patterns policies in VISION 2050. The plan includes policies addressing the urban growth area, centers, urban design, and rural and resource areas. The plan supports work with cities and towns to annex urban unincorporated areas. The plan includes policies to support development of interlocal agreements and to collaborate on the development of appropriate urban design measures with cities and towns.

The county should address the following comments in future updates to the plan:

- The county adopted amendments to the urban growth area in the plan update. VISION 2050 emphasizes maintaining a stable urban growth area (MPP-RGS-5) and annexation or incorporation of unincorporated urban areas during the planning period. The county's countywide planning policies support interjurisdictional collaboration. The county should coordinate with adjacent cities on development standards, growth expectations, and plans for annexation for any urban growth area expansions.



Housing

Scope of Review

The Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.070) and VISION 2050 call for local comprehensive plans to:

- Provide an **inventory and analysis** of existing housing and housing needs at each income level.
- Document **sufficient land capacity** to accommodate housing for all income levels and emergency shelters.
- Identify **actions** to provide housing for all income levels.
- Identify and address **racially disparate impacts, displacement, or exclusion** in housing.
- Expand housing capacity for **moderate-density housing**.
- Promote **jobs-housing balance**.
- Support the **development and preservation of affordable housing** by considering inclusionary and incentive zoning and promoting affordable housing near high-capacity transit.
- Promote **homeownership** opportunities.

Certification Findings

The Snohomish County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the housing policy topics in VISION 2050. The plan documents capacity to accommodate the county's allocated share of countywide housing need in the unincorporated area, including capacity for emergency housing. The plan provides supporting data and analysis on racially disparate impacts, exclusion, and displacement, and documents the history and lasting effects of discriminatory housing practices in Snohomish County. The plan includes an analysis of gaps in housing production. The plan includes a new targeted inclusionary zoning policy in the urban core subarea to provide for extremely low-, very low-, low- and moderate-income housing along with market rate housing near transit.

The county should address the following comment in future updates to the plan:

- The region is facing a housing crisis, and jurisdictions should act with urgency to address the housing needs of all residents. PSRC encourages the county to continue to work with regional partners to monitor housing conditions, to implement housing strategies, and to amend the plan periodically to adjust to changing conditions.



- In the plan, ADUs are included as providing capacity for housing in the 50% to 80% AMI range. Guidance from Commerce generally considers ADUs as moderate income (80–>120% AMI) for higher-cost communities in the central Puget Sound. The county should monitor the ability of ADUs to provide lower-income housing and look for opportunities to create additional capacity and remove barriers for housing in the lowest income ranges. Commerce’s [Guidance for Updating Your Housing Element \(Book 2\)](#) is a useful resource.

Economy

Scope of Review

VISION 2050 calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Identify and enhance **industry clusters**, including those that provide goods and services for export.
- Support retention and recruitment of **family wage jobs** and small businesses that are **locally, women-, and minority-owned**.
- Develop a **range of employment opportunities** to create a closer balance between jobs and housing.
- Address and prevent potential **physical, economic, and cultural displacement** of existing businesses.
- Expand **access to opportunity** and remove barriers for disconnected communities.
- Recognize and empower the contributions of the region’s **culturally and ethnically diverse communities**.

Certification Findings

The Snohomish County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the economy policies in VISION 2050. The Economic Development element reinforces policies throughout the plan to provide a high quality of life, connect people and businesses with infrastructure, provide affordable housing, and support adopted growth targets. The plan includes policies to promote education and training opportunities for the workforce, encourage ample and safe childcare facilities, promote tourism, and consider displacement mitigation strategies for businesses affected by growth and development.



Transportation

Scope of Review

The Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.070(6)) requires local comprehensive plans to:

- Use **internally consistent land use assumptions** and forecasts of travel demand and that are consistent with growth targets.
- Provide **inventories of existing facilities**, and level-of-service standards and concurrency provisions that address multiple modes of travel, planned land uses and densities, and state highways.
- Include a **multiyear financing plan** and reassessment strategy to address potential funding shortfalls.
- Direct **demand management**, including programs to implement the Commute Trip Reduction Act.
- Plan for **pedestrians and bicycles**, including capital investments, education, and safety.
- Discourage **incompatible uses adjacent to airports**.
- Address **air quality** and the reduction of pollutants consistent with WAC 173-420-080.

VISION 2050 also calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Plan for **system maintenance, safety and emergency management**.
- Support the **Regional Growth Strategy**.
- Provide **alternatives to driving alone**.
- Plan facilities and services for **special needs transportation**.
- Avoid the creation of new and expanded facilities in **rural areas**.
- Identify **racial and social equity** as a core objective when implementing transportation projects.
- Protect the **environment** and reduce stormwater pollution.

Certification Findings

The Snohomish County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the transportation planning requirements of the Growth Management Act and the transportation policies in VISION 2050. The Transportation element includes policies to develop transportation projects that increase stormwater infiltration and work with a variety of partners to identify, prioritize, and mitigate existing barriers to fish passage. The plan includes policies to encourage walk, bike, and transit trips and strategies to manage transportation demand. The project list includes projects to support mobility in the urban core and near planned high-capacity transit.

The county should address the following comments in future updates to the plan:



- Consistent with VISION 2050, the plan references policies and measures to implement multimodal level of service standards. The state will require multimodal level of service standards by 2029, and additional guidance may be available in the future to refine adopted standards.
- The county completed travel forecasting to inform the plan update. Future amendments to the plan should incorporate this forecast data in the adopted plan.
- The county received funding to update its Road Safety Action Plan through the federal Safe Streets and Roads for All program, which is currently in development. As this action plan progresses, relevant data and key findings should be incorporated into future comprehensive plan amendments to reflect transportation safety goals, priorities, and projects.

Public Services

Scope of Review

VISION 2050 calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Promote **coordinated and efficient** use of public services.
- Protect **water quality** by serving urban development with sewer systems and replacing failing septic systems.
- Consider the **impacts of climate change on public facilities** and promote renewable energy.
- Promote **affordable and equitable access to public services**, especially for underserved communities.
- Promote working with school districts on **school siting and design** to support safe, walkable access.

Certification Findings

The Snohomish County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the public services policies in VISION 2050. The plan includes policies to provide equitable access of public facilities and services to all communities, especially the historically underserved, and prioritize investments to address disparities. The plan promotes coordinated and efficient use of public services, for example coordinating with local jurisdictions to implement projects that would improve water quality and habitat on a watershed basis. The plan includes policies to build the resiliency of Snohomish County's utilities, public facilities, and public services by considering climate change, the environment, public health, and natural and human caused hazards.

Conclusion and Next Steps

PSRC found the Snohomish County comprehensive plan is substantially consistent with the transportation-related provisions of the Growth Management Act, VISION 2050 and the Regional Transportation Plan.

PSRC encourages the county to address areas identified for additional work in upcoming plan updates and other planning efforts. These may be areas where additional work would



make the plan more consistent with the Growth Management Act or VISION 2050 and areas that may be necessary to address prior to the 2029 Growth Management Act Implementation Progress Report.

PSRC is available to provide assistance with future plan updates. Find additional planning resources on [PSRC's Plan Review webpage](#). If the county has questions or needs additional information, please contact Liz Underwood-Bultmann at 206-464-6174 or LUnderwood-Bultmann@psrc.org.

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